

A bill that would grant students who are in the country illegally a pathway to residency will likely not be introduced again as a stand-alone piece of legislation.

Instead, some Congress members said the DREAM Act - for Development, Relief and Education for Minor Aliens - will likely become part of a comprehensive immigration reform package that could be introduced as early as fall of this year.

The DREAM Act would allow undocumented students to apply for legal permanent resident status, protect them from deportation and make them eligible for student loans and federal work study programs.

The proposed federal legislation - introduced by Sens. Richard Durbin of Illinois and Richard Lugar of Indiana, and Reps. Howard Berman of California and Lincoln Diaz-Balart of Florida - has been around since 2000, but faced opposition and defeat in 2007.

For now, the bill is in the Senate Judiciary Committee without a scheduled hearing for Congress, according to Max Gleischman, Durbin's press secretary. Still, emboldened by what they believe is growing support in Washington, students and college leaders have held marches in Orange County - the most recent last month at Santiago Canyon College.

Local Congress members have strong feelings about the proposed law, with most saying the measure would reward illegal behavior.

"People who come here from other countries and bring their families here illegally should not expect to get government scholarships or any other benefit for their families," said Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach. "It encourages more people to come here in order to get those very same benefits for their children."

Republican Congressman Ed Royce of Fullerton expressed the same concern.

"For every illegal immigrant admitted, an American student or legal resident would be turned away at a time when every state university is raising tuition, and many are curtailing

enrollment," Royce said in a written statement.

Rohrabacher and Royce are two of Orange County's six Congress members who said they'd vote against the measure if it were to come to the floor for a vote. Only Rep. Loretta Sanchez, (D-Santa Ana) said she would support the proposed law.

Sanchez said, however, that it was doubtful the bill would come to Congress in its former incarnation.

"I would prefer to have a comprehensive immigration reform which would have three parts, of course: better control of who's coming in and who's leaving our nation, some path of residency for people who are already here who have been good participants in our community and a future worker program for people who might want to come to the United States for work if we would need workers," she said.

Most Congress members cited the economic downturn as yet another reason to oppose the DREAM Act.

"I would argue that the economic conditions that we are currently in make the DREAM Act even less appealing than it was before," said Rep. John Campbell, (R-Irvine). "We have plenty of Americans out of work now. We have huge budget problems with the number of institutions of higher education and schools in general. To me it seems that we shouldn't provide taxpayer-funded college education to people who are not in this country illegally."

Rep. Ken Calvert called it a "tragic situation" involving people who had been brought here "illegally to no fault of their own," in a written statement.

However, he said, he would vote against the measure.

"My first priority must be to American citizens and legal residents," he added.

Congressman Gary Miller said he opposes any bill that would help people who are in the country illegally.

Miller pointed out that he introduced the LEAVE Act, which among other things specifically prohibits people who are in the country illegally from receiving in-state tuition.

Student marchers at Santiago Canyon College said the DREAM Act would allow illegal immigrant students to contribute to the U.S.

"The DREAM Act would allow these students to give back to America by becoming part of the Social Security system, by paying federal and state income tax and by using their ability and education to be productive members of society," said Sarah K. Rimack, vice president of the Santiago Canyon College Associated Student Government's Programming Board.